

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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VOL. I.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xiii. 34.

THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

CHAPTER II.

Continued from page 177.

WE may now consider how the heathen world were likely to receive the new religion: and, for this purpose, we willingly avail ourselves of the result of Mr. Gibbon's enquiries. "The various modes of worship," says this historian, "which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true,—by the philosophers, as equally false,—and by the magistrates, as equally useful." Now, among which of these three classes, were the Christian missionaries to hope for success? In the first place, they were Jews—a nation despised by them all,—they preached the divine mission of a man, whom the Roman governor had executed as a malefactor: they made no compromises with the prevailing vices, opinions, and superstitions of the world. Besides the prejudices arising from the antiquity of their religion, and from education, the people were bound to the established worship, by every consideration of pleasure and advantage.*

The philosophers, accustomed to regard all religions as false, would not be disposed to listen to the emissaries, or to enquire into the pretensions of a new one. The magistrates would at once declare war (as we know they did,) against a system, whose purpose was the entire subversion of the established worship—a worship, which was "interwoven with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public and private

* The sacrifices at the theatres, the sacramentum of the armies, the libations at public and private entertainments, the assemblies of the senate in consecrated places, the ceremony of dropping frankincense on the altar on these occasions, and the frequent recurrence of the public festivals, must not only have excluded the Christians of that time from all the offices and amusements of society, but have also rendered their lives a continued scene of mortification, insult, and alarm.

life, and with all the offices and amusements of society.*

From these considerations, the fact of the adverse state of the Jewish and heathen worlds to the reception of Christianity cannot be doubted. We will therefore proceed to shew its early and extensive prevalence, notwithstanding every opposition.

Tacitus, in his account of the emperor Nero's persecution, which we have already noticed, mentions, that "the superstition, though checked for a while, burst forth again, and spread, not only over Judea, but reached the city of Rome itself: at first they only were apprehended who confessed themselves of the Sect; but afterwards a vast multitude was discovered." This testimony to the early propagation of Christianity, by a stranger, and an enemy to the religion, is extremely material; it establishes, that it began in Judea, that it was preached with success there, and that it had, in the time of Nero (thirty years after the death of Christ, A. D. 64.) a great number (*multitudo ingens*) of converts at Rome. It is also the testimony of a historian of reputation, who lived near the time.

The account which Pliny gives of the number of Christians in the districts of Bithynia and Pontus (about eight years after the death of Christ,) is of the highest interest and importance. He complains, that "the contagion of the superstition had seized not cities only, but the smaller towns and the open country,—that the temples were almost deserted, the sacred solemnities for a long interval suspended, and scarce any purchasers to be found for the victims." This whole letter to the emperor Trajan is a very signal evidence of the progress of Christianity in a short period, for though the account was written about eighty years after Christ's crucifixion, it shews that the Christians had subsisted there for a considerable time. It speaks of them abruptly, as

* Hist. vol. I. page 464.

persons well known,—it mentions their trials,—and that the solemnities had in consequence of them, been suspended for a long interval. In another part, he says, "that some confessed themselves Christians three years ago, some longer, some twenty years." We have no reason for believing that the Christians were more numerous in Bithynia and Pontus, than in other parts of the Roman empire: Christianity did not begin in those countries, or near them: so that this evidence may be fairly considered as in some measure a proof of the general progress of the religion.

Mr. Gibbon* has taken great pains to diminish the number of early converts to Christianity, and would wish us to believe, that, even in the civilized parts of the Roman world, they bear a very inconsiderable proportion to the rest of mankind, during the third century,—but it should be remembered that the establishment of Christianity by Constantine, took place at the beginning of the fourth, and it now seems pretty well decided, that this arose from motives of policy, because the Christians were, by far the most powerful party of of the empire. This opinion is supported by the unsuspecting appeal of Julius Firmicus Maternus,† calling upon the emperors Constantius and Constans to extirpate the "expiring remains"‡ of idolatry,—as well as by the early establishment of Christianity, and ruin of paganism under Constantine and his immediate successors. It may also be added, that Maxentius, the rival of Constantine, flattered and favoured the Christians,—"So considerable had they become, under external disadvantages of all sorts."§

By these circumstances, I consider the early success and prevalence of Christianity sufficiently established, without appealing to the host of Christian witnesses,—who, however they

* Hist. vol. I. Chap. xv.

† Lardner, vol. VIII. page 262.

‡ *Morcentia Numbra*.

§ Lardner, vol. VII. page 280.

may have been accused of exaggeration, are, as to the general truth of the fact, uniformly supported, and never once opposed by pagan testimony.

To be continued.

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Dialogue between a Universalist and a Limitarian.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 175.

Lim. My dear friend I have carefully examined what you have offered on the passage in the 5th of John, which, in connection with the words of Christ to the Sadducees, on the subject of the resurrection, formed some difficulty in my mind. I have likewise complied with your request, and have compared Daniel xii. 1, 2, with Matt. xxiv. 21 and its connexion, and I must say that the construction you have put on the text in question seems to be justified by those passages. It seems about certain that the time to which Daniel's prophecy alluded was the same of which Jesus spake in the 24th of Matt. Daniel says; "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time;" and Jesus says; "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." And as there can be no doubt that Jesus alluded to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, so it is reasonable to apply the prophecy of Daniel to the same event. Being clear thus far, we are necessarily led to apply the following words of the prophet figuratively; "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." It seems evident that what the prophet here means must be the same of which Jesus spake when he said; "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." The distinction which was made between those who believed in Jesus among the Jews, and those who rejected him and his doctrine, and who persecuted his apostles and disciples, in the days of vengeance on Jerusalem, seems to be the subject of both this

passage in the 5th of John and the 12th of Daniel.

Uni. I am very happy, dear Sir, that you have succeeded in bringing those several passages into such an arrangement as to see their harmony, and of course to free your mind from the embarrassment produced by a seeming contradiction in the words of the Saviour. I may now presume that you see the necessity of making a careful distinction between sayings which were intended to be understood figuratively, and such as were evidently spoken in a plain and literal sense.

Lim. I am thoroughly convinced, that in general this distinction has not been sufficiently attended to in the reading of the Scriptures, especially the sayings of our Saviour. I have been led to notice that almost all the sayings of Christ, which are usually applied to prove a state of endless misery, are found among his parables. These parables, which were introduced into his discourses, for the purpose of illustrating the several parts of his subjects, and which naturally apply to events which were then about to take place, and which did soon come to pass, I find are made use of to prove a state of endless misery. And I must acknowledge that the evidence which is relied on to prove that dreadful doctrine, appears to me vastly less than it formerly did; and in fact quite insufficiently to support the ponderous weight which is laid upon it. But not to lose sight of our subject, I have a desire to extend the query still further respecting the moral state of man in the future world. As the Saviour in his refutation of the doctrine of the Sadducees, gave no intimation that any would rise from the dead to any other state than a glorious immortality, I would ask if this appears consistent with other testimony on the same subject?

Uni. As we have already agreed, that the plain literal sense of Scripture is the only safe guide in the present inquiry, I will proceed to consider the testimony of St. Paul on the subject of the resurrection, recorded 1 Cor. xv. 20—22, "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.—For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be

made alive." These words seem to have been designed to set up certain principles and facts as the foundation of a superstructure. You will observe that the apostle makes no sort of distinction between different classes of men. He says that Christ in his resurrection is the first fruits of them that slept; evidently including all that slept. In his epistle to the Romans, chap. 11th, this same author says; "If the first fruits be holy, the lump is also holy."—And this is evidently his meaning in this place. If Christ is the first fruits of all men, in his resurrection, and if, as the apostle here says, all who die in Adam are to be made alive in Christ, it appears perfectly clear, that in the resurrection, all men are in the same state of moral holiness with Christ himself; any thing short of this idea certainly comes short of the apostle's meaning, when he says: "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become of the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, also by man came the resurrection of the dead. For in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Lim. I cannot say that you have not stated the apostle's argument fairly, and according to the plainest sense of his words, but there seems to be no small difficulty in admitting that all men, however different their characters are in this world, will be raised into the same state, and all be alike holy in the resurrection: but I am not certain that there is any real difficulty in this thing more than what has its origin in tradition. We have been traditionated to believe that in a future state our condition would vary according as our conduct varies here in this mortal state. But whether this be fully supported by the divine testimony may be a question; I have understood, however, that Universalists hold that this will be the case for a season, and that the wicked will be punished, and the righteous rewarded; after which there will be a restoration of all to holiness and happiness.

To be continued.

FROM THE UNIVERSALIST MAGAZINE.
MR. EDITOR,

Being called upon a few days ago to attend the funeral of a Mrs. G. in a neighbouring town; at the house of mourning, the bereaved husband ob-

served, that in parting with his beloved friend and companion he had the consolation to behold her perfectly reconciled and submissive to the will of her Father in heaven, cheered with the divine hope of a glorious and happy immortality, not only for herself but for all mankind, that she could bid a short farewell to her husband and children in the full assurance of faith that they should soon meet in that blessed world, where they should never, never be separated. And I have had the evidence, added the husband, wiping the full tear that trembled in his eye, I have had the fullest evidence notwithstanding all that has been said to the contrary, that ONE Universalist has died, without renouncing the sentiment.

C.

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Monday, June 19th, 1820.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

It is the duty of every one who writes in a public paper, to notice every remark upon his sentiments, if couched in proper language, and Lector feels disposed to reply to the attack of "A Communicant," more on this account than any other; for the latter has so completely wandered from the point, as scarce to touch any thing asserted by Lector. [We considered the communication of "A Communicant" rather a *defence* than an *attack*; that is, a defence of an apostolic usage or custom; but, however, we shall not dispute about words. Lector should have understood, that, to all that part of his writing which had been *scarcely touched*, there was no objection: that is, it was thought best to leave it to bear its own weight; and we also are disposed to leave it *untouched*! By this, it will be seen, that, in our opinion, the object of C. was not to make an *attack*, but to give instruction.] L. shewed by Scripture, that the true communion was known before the coming of Jesus in the flesh, 1 Cor. x. 3, 4, all our fathers "did eat of the same spiritual food," &c. C. has *asserted* contrary to this, and to history, that it was instituted by Jesus. [L. is mistaken in what C. has asserted. He has not asserted contrary to 1 Cor. x. 3, 4, nor that what L. calls "the

true communion" was "instituted by Jesus." But, we are inclined to think L. did not understand him.] L. shewed, "Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you," John vi. 53; C. has not proven that the literal flesh is the life. [Neither was it necessary that he should, for he had asserted no such thing.] L. has said that the breaking of bread was a common practice, Acts ii. 46. and history informs us that the Jews brake and blessed bread—C. has not proved the contrary. [Did the Jews, either before or since the coming of Christ, ever break bread in remembrance of Jesus? If not, what has the Jews' blessing and breaking bread to do with this subject? Admitting all that L. has stated, it only shews that bread had been broken on other occasions, and for other purposes than the commemoration of Christ; but this, we conceive, is no argument why it should not be used on this occasion, and for this purpose.] L. has exhorted the reader to put away the meat which perisheth, to attain that which endureth unto everlasting life. [To this we say *amen*: but then, it does not necessarily follow that we are to abstain from food altogether, or that we should never eat bread literally in remembrance of Christ.] L. has shewn Matt. xxvi. that the wine spoken of is not literal, else it could not be used "in my Father's kingdom." [The wine might be literal, although the language was figurative. Will L. undertake to shew, that literal wine was not made use of when Jesus "took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying 'Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the remission of sin?'" and will he undertake to say, that there was no *fruit of the vine* present when Jesus said, "I will not drink henceforth of *this* fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom?" Now if L. has shown that there was neither literal bread nor literal wine used, on the occasion above mentioned, nor in that which the apostle calls "the Lord's Supper," then we are wrong; otherwise his remarks are altogether irrelative to any thing for which C. has contended.] The reader will easily perceive, by attentively reading the pieces, that C. has not answered a

single objection. [For a very good reason, as we conceive, because there was no objection, to any thing for which C. was disposed to contend, to answer.] It may be well enough, however, to follow him and notice his remarks. He appears to have misunderstood the design of L., whether it was to condemn the observance of the Lord's Supper, or to speak of the abuses of it—C. should have attended more carefully to the writing of L., he would then have found that the true Supper was not condemned, "The communion we believe in, is the operation of the still small voice within us," it was not this but the human substitute, the morning supper, that we aimed at. [Has L. shown that what he calls the *true supper*, is what the apostle meant by the *Lord's Supper*?—or that what he calls, the *human substitute*, or by way of *cant*, "the morning supper," was not eaten by the apostles and primitive Christians in remembrance of Christ, whom they were pleased to call their Lord and master? If he has shown this, then we are mistaken; if not, then he does not come to the point for which we contend.] There is also something erroneous in the opinion of C., that nothing should be laid aside, because abused; a moments consideration will shew the weakness of this, for if the thing abused produced less good than the abuse does evil, should it not be laid aside? If fifty cent pieces were so counterfeited, that the community in general could not distinguish the spurious, would it not be perfectly correct to abolish the pieces? not because the true were bad, but because the abuse outbalanced the good—L. considers the literal bread an abuse, how much more the slaughter it caused; yet the true bread he holds to, because its influence is far beyond the sphere of its abuse. [Although fifty cent pieces might perhaps be counterfeited, as above stated, yet this would never prevent those who are capable of distinguishing the true coin from the spurious, from passing the *true* as current among themselves.] Does C. think that when Christ "did break *literal* bread," &c. that he meant this *literal* bread to be considered his "body," if not, he gives up the contest. [If C. had so contended, then surely the contest must be given up; but we see nothing for which C. has contended that he is yet bound to

give up.] C. asserts that the institution took its rise at that time, we have shewn above that it was observed *spiritually* by all our fathers, and if the literal sense is held to, it was a common practice with the Jews.

He further says, this "has never so much as once been doubted in the Christian church." Does he not know that sects have quarrelled, and doubted about the mode of performing it, and what is it but a ceremony at last?

[To the spiritual sense we do not object; but L. has not shown that either the fathers or the Jews, ever ate bread or drank wine *literary* in remembrance of the "man Christ Jesus," and should he attempt to show this, he would certainly fail in the attempt. And that this institution, right or wrong, viz. of eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Christ, and, since his resurrection more particularly, in remembrance of his death and sufferings, "took its rise at that time," we believe with C., never has been doubted by any denomination of Christians! Some, particularly the Quakers, have supposed that the design has been misunderstood, and therefore, have laid it aside; but even they, so far as we have understood, do not doubt the truth of what C. asserted; that is, that it *took its rise* at that time. But we suspect that C. was not fully understood.]

We think we have pointed out "some evil in the observance of *this* institution," and what "good resulting from it" is best known to C., and belongs to him to show. [If L. has pointed out any evil in the observance of *this* institution as observed by the apostles, or according to the directions of St. Paul, (1 Cor. xi.) we are ready to reply; but if the evil has originated from other sources, we cease to be accountable.]

The Communicant expresses pity for "that soul who could behold with cold indifference," &c. whether this was meant for us or no, matters not; we cheerfully acknowledge the character, but the pity is too deeply expressed, and too highly admired by us, to take it from its lawful owner. We scorn to receive a coat which would not shield us, but might warm the back of its possessor, yet 'tis strange, that "a pious brother or sister who being *weak* in faith, needs the aid of outward rites, types and shadows," should commise-

rate the one "who can go right to the fountain and draw water out of the wells of salvation. [In regard to *pity* &c. we are as willing to receive it as to bestow it. But L. mistakes the meaning of C. if he thinks he meant to commiserate the circumstance of his being able to "go right to the fountain," &c. and we hope he will not despise those who, though perhaps at a more humble distance, feel refreshed by placing themselves in a position where they are enabled to taste of those streams which make glad the city of God. The remembrance of Christ is the stream from which we, as it were, drink those words which are "spirit, and are life;" and the bread and wine, taken in this manner only serve to call up this remembrance. But if the fountain itself does not warm any one so, but that he can behold "with *cold* indifference," &c. (see page 171;) this is the circumstance which in our opinion deserves pity: and even should this pity grow out of human weakness, we conceive that it ought not on that account to be any less acceptable.] L. does not despise any religious opinion, his object is investigation, and whilst he hears around him the crash of overturned corruptions, and sees religion divested of those hideous creeds, which have disgraced it, he cannot help but call on men to examine what he thinks error, and advise them to leave a muddy stream, and go "right to the fountain and draw water out of the wells of salvation."

LECTOR.

[When L. has convinced us that the stream of which he speaks is "muddy," or that it led the apostles to any other fountain, than that of Christ, whom they were thus called upon to remember, then, and not till then, are we prepared to lay it aside.]

[N. B. This writer will excuse us for interlarding his piece with a few remarks; especially when we inform him that our only motive has been to save room, and prevent the necessity of quotations, or a more lengthy reply. Our remarks will be distinguished from *his* by being inclosed in brackets; and if they should be satisfactory to "A Communicant," they will prevent the necessity of any other reply.]

ED.

For sale by the Editor of the Messenger, No. 343 Market street.

Ballou on Atonement, \$ 1 00
Columbian Miscellany, 75
Series of Letters, (Ballou.) 37½

Pamphlets distributed gratis.

Just received, a copy of Hough's Third Edition of the AMERICAN DEFINITION SPELLING BOOK; which answers all the purposes in common schools, of a Spelling Book and Dictionary.

School-masters, and others, are respectfully invited to call and examine this Book; as it is presumed they would find it much to the advantage of their pupils, as well as to facilitate the task of teaching, to introduce it into their schools.

It has been ascertained that our new Carrier made out his route book by one that was very imperfect, which accounts for the number that has been missed. The mistake being discovered, we hope there will be no further occasion of complaint. Some few papers have been stopped in consequence of non-payment, being more than six months in arrears.

DIED,

On the 4th inst. at his residence in the South Carolina college, Dr. JONATHAN MAXCY, for sixteen years the admired and revered president of that institution.

On the 10th inst. Mr. JOHN B. FOUSSATT, a native of France, but for many years a respectable merchant in this city.

POETS' CORNER.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

ACROSTIC.

From clime to clime, from pole to pole,
Redemption to mankind was given;
Each human form, each human soul,
Eternal bliss must taste in heaven.
Mighty and wonderful are thy ways,
Almighty God of boundless love;
Nature itself joins in thy praise,
The fish, the reptile, and the dove.

Sweet is the path that virtue treads,
Calm'd by religion's softening smile;
Once firmly seated on our heads,
The paths of vice can ne'er beguile.
Then let us join in purest love,
And look for help to God above.

FREEMAN.